

# Myth or motivation?

Want to win new customers for your practice? *John Scarrott* explains how to bust some new business myths and find the right mindset to rethink your approach to business expansion.



## TEN SECOND SUMMARY

- 1 Winning new business should be based on a gradual, natural and human interaction.
- 2 Are ingrained beliefs about winning new business a discouragement to progress?
- 3 Start a conversation to build relationships, create opportunities and win new clients.

When done well, winning new business is similar to starting a personal relationship. On a first date it would be unusual to immediately ask that person to marry you. The same applies to winning new business – it needs to be a gradual, natural and human interaction. In this world of automation and artificial intelligence, de-automating and re-humanising the approach to winning business is the right way to go.

### What does this mean for accountants?

As for every other professional service, accountants are facing challenges when it comes to marketing and selling their expertise. To surmount this, advisers should review how they do this and think about how to reach out and be more proactive around winning new business. So just how can they do this? How do they build relationships and have the conversations that win customers?

Are you asking yourself these questions? Are they being asked around your practice? And how are you responding to them?

Often, there will be a range of responses and the challenge may be resisted. This might, for example, be by relying on the strength of existing client relationships – perhaps promoting the benefits of working together more strongly.

Alternatively, it might be seen as a storm that will blow over in time.

Then again, perhaps you are inclined to face the challenge. Ask yourself: “What are we going to do differently when it comes to winning new business?” Perhaps this is the scariest and the most exciting question of all. Where do we start when it comes to thinking differently about this?

For a start, some beliefs about winning new business might be getting in your way. The things we think must be done, but prefer not to and therefore don’t do. It’s easier to identify things that are disliked or that we are disinclined to do. And often these are the very things that can keep us stuck. When looked at slightly differently, they may hold some inspiration on how to get moving. Then I’ll give you two further suggestions on what to do next.

### New business myths

In one of the great Greek myths, Theseus is taken to Crete to be eaten by the Minotaur – a creature that roams the labyrinth beneath the king’s palace. However, he slays the beast before safely escaping and returning home to Athens. Before we move our business forward to win new business, perhaps we also need to kill off a few “myths” on this subject.

- “I must chase/pursue people.” We don’t like to feel chased and we don’t like to chase. We feel as though we’re “after someone” and we feel they must be “running away from us”.
- “I must ‘pitch’ them,” When we finally reach our new prospect, we feel the need to tell them everything about our business. We want to cram in as much useful information as possible, while they listen quietly and obediently. This feels “too much”, even when done with the best of intentions.



**John Scarrott** is a trainer and coach working with professionals on their approach to selling, speaking, presenting and networking. He specialises in working with professionals who are experts in their area but need to become more confident and comfortable in their communication to practice their expertise. He has more than 20 years’ experience in sales, networking and presenting.  
E: john@johnscarrott.com  
W: www.johnscarrott.com

- *"I must overcome their objections."* Following the pitch come our prospect's concerns. They'll come back with questions and objections such as "We don't see the need for this." We treat these as barriers to jump over but, quite frankly, this is starting to feel much like a war of attrition.
- *"I must do most of the talking."* We start to speak and then just carry on speaking. This feels uncomfortable, so we either carry on and feel bad or don't start at all and feel frustrated.
- *"I must close them."* There is an immortal line from a famous film: "ABC – 'Always Be Closing'." We must ask for the business, but we don't want to be heavy handed or do a "smash and grab" job so we hold off.
- *"I must contact as many people as possible."* Another approach is "spray and pray" – the more people we contact the more chances we have of making a sale. This feels too broad and random so we are reluctant to follow that road.

These are all "winning new business myths" and are best avoided. The problem, of course, is that these myths are so ingrained that it is awkward to uncover alternatives so we find it difficult to make progress past them. Consequently, we end up following some of these approaches but we don't feel great about this and still find that we are not getting the results we want.

### Myth-busting

The way to create some room and become unstuck is to reframe these myths ever so slightly. A change in our way of thinking can lead to a change in our actions and in this way we can make ourselves more comfortable with winning work.

Rather than relying on outdated myths, there are some more realistic alternative practices that we can put to good use.

- *"I'll be consistent."* Think about sales as a journey rather than a moment in time. What journey do we want to take our client on? How do we communicate it? To be effective, we need to be consistent and be useful to our clients and prospects. Think about how they can be supported with something useful before they have become a client.
- *"I'll have a point of view."* What do you think and why? If we have a point of view we have something that can be discussed and debated. It can be shared and can evolve. Unlike a pitch, we don't get attached to it and are happy for people to debate and disagree with it. We can include the client in our point of view and this can develop an understanding of how you add value.
- *"I'll be curious and listen."* Ask a question, listen to the response and ask about that. What you hear will not feel like an "objection" because nothing will have been pitched. It may feel more like a "concern", in which case ask the client to say more about it and discuss how it could be addressed.
- *"I'll have a conversation."* This is a two-way exchange and has an agenda that has been

pre-agreed. The course of the conversation can change and wind around. It may become a series of conversations that take place over time. The outcome is learning for both sides. The client leads the conversation.

- *"I'll ask them what they'd like to do next."* When it seems the right moment ask questions. "What else do we need to look at? What needs to happen next? Shall we move forward?" This becomes the "close".
- *"I'll focus on the right clients for us."* We need to consider with whom our thinking or point of view will have most resonance. Look at existing clients. What are they like? What characterises how the practice works for them, what benefits them and what is the relationship between client and adviser? Accountants should ask themselves whether they are seeking more of these clients or should they be looking elsewhere?

### From myth to movement

There are some other things we can do to get things moving.

- *Turn this from an I into a We.* Start a conversation with colleagues and involve the whole business. Establish the existing attitudes towards winning business and see how many "myths" can be heard.
- *Understand how best to win business.* What does everyone agree on? What would suit the clients best? What will work for you and your practice?
- *Go on your own journey.* It's not possible to flick a switch and have a result. Answers to the above questions will come over time through discussions with clients.

There are three places that we can find material for discussion: our clients, our ideas and ourselves. Reviewing these three areas and establishing where they overlap is how options can be found. These are the ingredients to finding an effective way to build relationships and create the conversations that secure new business.

- *Our clients.* What are the challenges and changes they are experiencing and what do they think about it? What are their options?
- *Our ideas.* What is our point of view on these topics? What can we offer in relation to the challenges our clients and new prospects are facing? Where do we fit in and why?
- *Ourselves.* Who are we when it comes to these challenges? What are we experiencing? What do we personally believe that can be done for our clients? Why does that matter to us?

### Conclusion

A useful way for the accounting profession to respond to the effects of increased automation is to head in the opposite direction when it comes to marketing their expertise. Rather than mythical methods, a human approach to starting conversations brings with it the chance to build relationships and create the opportunities to work with clients that no "chat-bot" would be able to replicate. What do you think?

### FURTHER INFORMATION

Further Information Register for the "Winning new business" half-day workshop  
Date: 20 June 2018  
Time: 9:30am – 1pm  
Where: IFA head office, London EC1R 0AT  
Cost: £85.00 inc VAT  
CPD: 3.5